

SALVADOR

SOUNDING OUT



With its beautiful, multicoloured architecture, abundance of culture and UNESCO World Heritage status, there has never been a better time to explore this north-eastern Brazilian city

WORDS & MAIN PHOTO ALEX ROBINSON

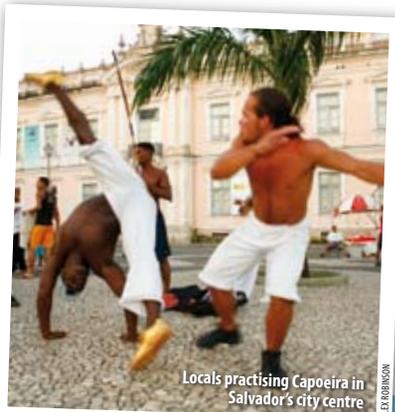
Whilst New York and London invite descriptive prose and grainy black and whites, words and pictures fail Salvador. This is a city which, like a dance, must be experienced to be understood, and the experience of being in Salvador comes with a rich and varied musical soundtrack. Drums and songs echo throughout the city – from the sweaty and crumbling lower port to the higgledy-piggledy cobbled streets of ornate churches and shambolic mansions which crown the cliff above it. Music reverberates in the breeze-block *favelas* and glides over the sound of the crashing ocean waves on the myriad city beaches.

Brazil began in Salvador in the 16th century as a few houses built from middens and palm thatch, gazing wistfully back

across the sea to Portugal – which the colonists named All Saints' Bay – Baía de Todos os Santos – or Bahia, for short. By the 18th century, Salvador was Brazil's capital city and Bahia had become a captaincy – a region bigger than Spain and Portugal combined. City and captaincy had grown rich on sugar – harvested and refined by enslaved West Africans, transported in

greater numbers than to any other location in the Americas. Yoruba peoples from modern-day Guinea and Angola brought their rhythms and these met with the chants, cadences and combat skills of the native Tupi-Guarani, and the modes and melodies of Portugal, to produce a uniquely Bahian musical culture. Samba, *bossa nova*, *capoeira*, *batucada* and *tropicalia* were all born in Bahia, honed in Salvador and exported to Rio de Janeiro and the world.

Foreign musicians have been coming on pilgrimages to Salvador for decades – Paul Simon and later Michael Jackson recorded on the Pelourinho – a colourful square in the historical city centre – with local *batucada* band Olodum. Larry Coryell and Billy Cobham performed and made an album on the waterfront with Bahian master guitarist and composer Dori Caymmi. Their interest came in spite of a lack of government support. But after years of neglect, the city's publicly funded cultural scene is undergoing a renaissance, with a spate of new openings, including a centre for Afro-Brazilian music run by maverick Salvador composer and master of percussive ceremonies, Carlinhos Brown. There hasn't been a better time to visit for decades.



Locals practising Capoeira in Salvador's city centre
ALEX ROBINSON



A view of Salvador's colonial centre and the church of Nossa Senhora do Rosario dos Pretos, built by slaves and still a centre for the Afro-Brazilian community today

RECORD STORES

Caná Brava Records

One of the best shops in Brazil for quality local music – from batucada to tropicalia and rare 1970s Brazilian groove.

Rua Joao de Deus 22, +55 71 3321 0536, www.bahia-online.net/brazilian-music.htm

WHERE TO BUY A BERIMBAU

The *berimbau* is an Afro-Brazilian bowed instrument made from a pole, brake cable and a large gourd. It's played in capoeira and Bahian samba. Best to buy them at the Oficina de Investigação Musical where the proprietor has made berimbaus for famous Bahian musicians including Carlinhos Brown.

Rua Alfredo Brito 24, Pelourinho

LISTINGS AND INFO

Bradt Bahia

Written by the author of this article and the only book in English devoted to Bahia.

Footprint Brazil

More information on Brazilian music than any other guide.

www.brazilmax.com

The best general overview of Salvador and Brazil with some music features and downloads.

BARS & CLUBS

Casa do Olodum

This cultural centre tucked away in a pretty colonial town house in the historical centre is the home of the batucada drum orchestra Olodum who perform live every Tuesday and Sunday at 7pm outside the building.

Rua Gregório de Matos 22, Historical Centre, www.olodum.uol.com.br

Casa do Ilê Aiyê

The headquarters of the city's longest established and most fiercely proud African-Brazilian batucada drum troupe is another brightly coloured town house in the historical centre. The orchestra give electric performances at carnival and most weekend nights at their show hall in Liberdade. Be sure to take a cab to the front door of the latter – Liberdade is a sketchy neighbourhood.

Rua das Laranjeiras 16, with a concert hall at the Associação Cultural Bloco Carnavalesco Ilê Aiyê, Rua do Curuzu, 228, Liberdade, www.ileaiye.org.br

Praça do Reggae

This square next to the egg-shell blue church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos – itself the cynosure of African-Brazilian culture in the city – is home to a string of sweaty local and backpacker-packed, spit-and-sawdust street bars where Brazilian bands play Bahian reggae. Be wary of pick-pockets.

Ladeiro do Pelourinho, in the historical centre

Centro de Música Negra & Museu de Ritmo

Carlinhos Brown's museum-cum-show hall is housed in the gutted interior of a magnificent 18th century mansion house, nestled in a dodgy area between the cliffs of upper Salvador and the old



SECRETARIA CULTURAL

docks. This is the premier spot for African Brazilian music in the old city centre. The museum won't open until later in the year but it's worth visiting for the building alone.

Rua Torquato Bahia 84, Edifício Mercado do Ouro

Mercado do Peixe

A popular semi-open air club and bar area on the beach in the Rio Vermelho neighbourhood, where waiters dish out cold beer and bar snacks almost until dawn, when it reverts to being a seafood market.

Rio Vermelho (on the beachfront opposite the Blue Tree Towers Hotel)

Praça Beco d'Água

Another little cobbled square with down-at-heel but lively bars centred around a stage which plays host to local live acts on Tuesdays and much drinking and dancing on weekend nights.

Just off Rua JC Rabelo, in the historical centre

Santo Antônio Botequim

A faux-New Orleans jazz and blues bar and restaurant offering a bizarre menu (ostrich steaks and Bahian snacks) and live bossa nova. One of the best bars for dancing to live music in the city.

Avenida Otavio Mangabeira 2323, Jardim dos Namorados, www.santoantoniobotequim.com.br

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Carnaval

Salvador hosts Brazil's largest and most raucous Mardi Gras carnival. Unlike Rio's, it's a street festival dominated by pounding *axe* pop and the powerful, percussive batucada street parades of the *blocos afro* – including Olodum, Ilê Aiyê and Carlinhos Brown's Timbalada.

Every February-March, 47 days before Easter, www.carnaval.salvador.ba.gov.br

Festa do Bonfim

On the third Sunday in January up to a million pilgrims dressed in traditional Bahian dresses and white suits gather outside the beautiful Portuguese church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praia to process to the peninsula of Bonfim a few kilometres



A raucous crowd fills out the square of Pelourinho during a traditional carnival

to the east. At the end of the walk they wash the steps of Bonfim church with perfumed water in a cleansing and purification rite, dedicated to the Afro-Brazilian (Candomblé) creator divinity Oxalá, who is worshipped as Christ in Bahia.



Experience Carnival firsthand with Songlines Music Travel

The author of this piece, Alex Robinson, will be leading a *Songlines Music Travel* trip to Carnival in Salvador & São Paulo in February 2012. See www.songlinesmusictravel.com or p27 for more information on this and all our other trips.